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ABSTRACT

The advent of electronic mass communications in the 1920s forever altered the rhetoric, the audience, and the echoes or responses of the State of the Union Address. Presidents thereafter would use the occasion to speak primarily to the public and secondarily to the Congress. The echoes of the speech that reverberate within the Congress, among the voters, and in the press set up a tension among the audiences that suggest that the meaning of the address is not so much contained in the words the president speaks as in those responses. For example, press commentaries precede and follow a speech for days. Ronald Reagan's 1987 State of the Union address was given poor marks by the press, in part because of his drastically altered persona. In 1980, he had arrived with a reputation as "The Great Communicator," and the metaphor of the lone gunslinger who rides into town, cleans it up, and rides on served him well. But his 1987 rhetorical shootout at the congressional podium did not touch on the details of the Iran controversy, offered no apologies, and presented nothing different from previous speeches. Members of congress paid more attention to each other than to the president, responding with partisan jeers and cheers. As for Reagan and his White House-in-turmoil, many observers saw him "riding into the sunset" and into history like the Western heroes of his movie generation. The president, in giving a disappointing, uninspiring speech that repeated old ideas and phrases, failed to salvage any remaining usefulness for his administration's final two years. (Thirty-nine footnotes are included.) (NKA)

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The 1987 State of the Union Address: Riding into the Sunset

> He was the man who rode into our little valley out of the heart of the great glowing West and when his work was done rode back whence he had come. --Jack Schaefer, Shane.[1]

Introduction

The U.S. Constitution does not specify how the President shall report on the state of the Union.[2] However, the chairman of the Constitutional Convention, George Washington, had as his model the "King's speech" which opened each session of the British parliament. As Kathleen Jamieson has noted, "Faced with an unprecedented rhetorical situation, [President] Washington responded to the Constitutional enjoinder...by delivering a speech rooted in the monarch's speech from the throne."[3]

She adds, "The Congress...promptly reacted as Parliament traditionally

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1. Jack Schaefer, Shane. N.Y.:Bantam Books, 1963 p. 119.

2. "The Executive power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America. He shall hold this office during the term of four years, and...He shall from time to time give to the Congress Information of the State of the Union, and recommend to their Consideration and such Measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient;"-- From Article II, Sections 1 and 3, Constitution of the United States.

3. Kathleen M. Jamieson, "Antecedent Genre as Rhetorical Constaint." The Quarterly Journal of Speech, 61:406-415 (December) 1975.

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reacted to the King, and drafted, debated, and delivered an 'echoing speech' in reply." So closely did Congress's reply echo the president's speech that, noted Jamieson, "Should Fortune eradicate the annual messages of Washington and Adams, scholars could reconstruct them from their mirror images, the reply speeches."[4]

However, this echoing lasted only through those first two presidential terms. Thomas Jefferson, who became third president in 1800, spurned the monarchial model and complied with the letter of the law by sending written messages, a practice that was followed until 1913, when Woodrow Wilson renewed the annual oral presentation--minus the royalist trappings. Little did Wilson suspect how radically and how soon the primary audience of the Message would change.

For more than a century it had been only the press which echoed the Message. Voters (and the President and the Congress) could read reports of the Annual Messages in newspapers and magazines. Since these reports were, of course, screened by the perceptions of the reporters who heard or read the Messages, they were, in effect, secondary echoes.

A great change came in the 1920s with the advent of electronic mass communications, when the State of the Union address began being transmitted over radio; in three more decades such addresses would start being also televised. The very situation of being broadcast forever altered the rhetoric, the audience, and the echoes of the Address. Each President thereafter would use the occasion to speak primarily to the public and secondarily to the Congress. The State of the Union was no longer primarily a chief executive's constitutionally- mandated persuasion of the legislature but his opportunistic political persuasion of the populace.

Richard Cohen noted in the Washington Post that "Sometime shortly after the dawn of the television age, the State of the Union speech ceased to be what the Framers intended--a report by the president to Congress--and instead became yet another presidential appearance before the viewers."[5]

The New York Times's William Safire has observed that the state of the 'State of the Union' began changing again "when Presidents and their media advisers thought they could use the Congress as a nice backdrop for a speech."[6]

In the view of Historian Arthur Schlesinger, "the age of television has now made the State of the Union Message an occasion for national display

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4. Jamieson, p. 412.

5. Richard Cohen, "...Even with Cheerleaders." Washington Post, 110:A21 (Jan. 28) 1987.

6. William Safire, "Debate of the Union," N.Y. Times, 136:A27 (Jan. 29) 1987.

which no future President will ever deny himself... Annual Messages can by no means be relied on for a full and exact record of the state of the Union. Most of the time, as devices in the presidential management of Congress, they tended to employ the rhetoric of consensus, seeking to minimize differences, to mollify opposition and to court support."[7]

Voice and Echo

Both the voice and echo of the State of the Union changed during two centuries and during the terms of 40 presidents. Expanding on Jamieson's suggestion that Congressional echoes of the first two presidents' Messages offer a perspective from which to view those speeches, we suggest that the changes of the subsequent Messages' primary audience have produced four major categories of echoes:

1. The Congress, as a collection of individuals, echoes the speech. This occurs: as it is given, by cheering or jeering; after it is given, by interviews with the press, and, by passing (or failing to pass) the President's suggested legislation.

2. The voters echo the speech. They do this by: discussions among themselves and by communicating to their legislators, telling them they are in favor of, or opposed to, the President's suggestions.

3. The press echoes the speech. This occurs: in live broadcasts on radio and television; by news reports summarizing and highlighting what the President will say and has said; by commentary on the message and its echoes.

4. The echoes which reverberate among the other three categories. The President comments on the reactions to his speech and thus echoes the echoes of the Congress and of the voters and of the press. The Congress echoes not only the President's message but also his echoes and the echoes of the voters and the press. The voters echo not only the Message but also the echoes of the Congress and of the Press and of the President to other echoes. The press echoes not only the echoes of the Congress and the voters, but also of the President and of other segments of the press.

Furthermore, the echoing sets up a tension among the audiences--so much so that the original oratory gets lost in the cross-communication. In fact, the case can be made that the meaning of this Address is not so much contained in the words the President speaks as in its echoes. One evidence

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7. Arthur M. Schlesinger, "Annual Messages of the Presidents: Major Themes of American History," in Fred L. Israel (Ed.), The State of the Union Messages of the Presidents, Vol. I: 1790-1966. N.Y.: Chelsea House/Robert Hector, Publishers, 1966, pp. xvii-xviii.

of this is that only such "prestigious" large newspapers as The N.Y. Times and the Washington Post, publish the complete text of the Address while echoes of the Address appear in just about all general-circulation newspapers, news magazines, and news broadcasts.

This indicates that the significance of the Address might not be in the speech itself but in the commentaries on the Address. In other words, by its echoes is this speech known.

And, unlike the natural phenomenon, where echo follows voice, commentaries often appear in the press for days before the Address is given, so that an advance feed-back effect exists. It has its benefits: the President (and his speech writers) tailor the Address to satisfy concerns which are raised in these advance commentaries.

The voice and echoes of the most recent State of the Union Address are readily available, thanks to this era of instantaneous worldwide mass communication. Thus the heavy press coverage of Pres. Ronald Reagan's January 27, 1987 State of the Union offers an interesting perspective from which to view it.

Since an attempt to use all available press comment would be a massive undertaking that is beyond the capability of an individual researcher, a sampling of press sources, in both print and electronic media, have been employed instead. These include: three American Broadcasting Company commentators and one from the Public Broadcasting System; The Washington Post, The New York Times, Chicago Tribune, and Grand Rapids Press newspapers; and, The New Yorker, Time, Newsweek, and U.S. News & World Report magazines.

The 1987 Address: Background

That the press was less reverential in its approach to the 1987 State of the Union Address than to most previous ones can be attributed to the unique circumstances preceding and surrounding this year's address.

A reason for the press's cynicism was the drastically altered persona of Ronald Reagan. He is described as an actor playing a leader who "seemed to possess all the virtues of the Western hero he portrayed so often and so well on the screen" in movie theaters and on homes TV.[8] Reagan had trotted into politics as president of the Screen Actors Guild and galloped in as governor of California for two terms. In 1980 he outdrew incumbent Jimmie Carter, largely with his rhetorical guns that were loaded with his ability to deliver lines well, especially before the television cameras. His reputation as The Great Communicator, especially on television, was reinforced when he shot

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8. Thomas S. Szasz, The Washington Post, 95:A19 (May 6) 1971, p. A19.

down with a 49-state victory Walter Mondale's 1984 effort to unseat him.[9]

In leaving a document for history, and in fulfilling the requirement and constraints of antecedent genre, Reagan was expected to continue, as Walter Fisher observed, "To run counter to heroic presidents, such as Washington, Lincoln and FDR, who sought to transcend the past by forging forward-looking policies and programs."[10] Thus Reagan, here as before, would seek to persuade Congress to drag the future backward toward the past, by trying to revert America to the ideologies of a century ago.

Reagan, the host of the Western TV series, Death Valley Days, well serves the metaphor of the lone gunslinger who rides into town, does what he has to to clean it up, and rides on.

For the first six years of his presidency, Reagan was considered the Teflon President. Like the plastic coating of cooking ware, nothing untoward would stick to him. Then in November 1986 came the defeat of enough of Reagan's supporters in the Senate, for whom he campaigned heavily, to allow a Democratic majority. Upon the heels of his first election defeat came one of the worst scandals to hit Washington.

George de Lama, in the Chicago Tribune on January 25, two days before the speech was delivered, noted that Reagan will confront widespread public suspicion that he has lied about his role in the sale of U.S. arms to Iran and the diversion of some profits to rebel forces fighting in Nicaragua."[11]

In his Address, Reagan would have to stifle lingering concerns that his advanced age and recent political troubles have diminished his capacity to govern. Everyone would also be listening for the tone he would set for conducting expectedly difficult relations over the next two years with his first Denmocratic Congress.

Time magazine regarded the speech "as Reagan's golden--and perhaps last--chance to reassert his leadership."[12]

ABC's Peter Jennings noted the night of the speech that "This is viewed

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9. "Ronald Reagan Wins Landslide Re-election." Hana Umlauf Lane (Ed.), The World Almanac Book of Facts, 1985. N.Y.: Newspaper Enterprise Assn., Inc., 1984, p. 35.

10. Walter R. Fisher, "Romantic Democracy, Ronald Reagan, and Presidential Heroes." The Western Journal of Speech Communication. 46:299-310 (Summer) 1982.

11. George de Lama, "State of the Union speech could be watershed." Chicago Tribune, 140:6 (Jan. 25) 1987.

12. George J. Church, "Flocking Together on Trade." Time, 129:24 (Feb. 2) 1987.

as one of the most important speeches in the President's career." Sam Donaldson agreed and added, "It was meant to play for the country."

In recent times, only Richard Nixon, in delivering his 1974 State of the Union address, had to speak in a comparable highly-charged political atmosphere.[13]

The 1987 Address: The Delivery

At the appointed hour, the President entered the great assembly hall of the House of Representatives and was escorted to the podium by members of the Congress, amid much cheering and handshaking. The old gunslinger was being welcomed back to town. At the podium, he began his rhetorical shootout. He addressed those present and the lens of the TV cameras which carried images of his face and voice to millions of Americans.

He began by following the tradition set by Washington. According to The Washington Post, "Reagan opened the speech with a gesture of bipartisanship directed at the new (Democratic) House Speaker, Rep. Jim Wright (D-Tex)." His speech was sprinkled with offers to cooperate with Congress. He quoted three Democratic presidents--Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and John F. Kennedy.

The press echoed the disappointment of Congress and voters in the rest of Reagan's speech.

The Post noted he "did not touch on the details of the controversy, including U.S. sale of weapons to Iran, the diversion of money from the weapons sales to aid the Nicaraguan contras, or resignation of his national security adviser and the firing of a key deputy. Reagan also did not repeat his previous assertions that the United States had not been trading arms for American hostages being held in Lebanon." Also noted was that "The President did not apologize for the Iran decisions as some members of Congress have urged."[14]

A New Yorker writer commented, "What's more peculiar about this $40-million deal is that I don't get any sense of embarrassment coming from our president, Mr. Reagan. It's as if he hadn't noticed. In his State of the Union speech, he didn't say, 'By the way, folks, about the $40-million of your money that seems to have, uh, gotten away from us here, I want you to know that we're leaving no stone unturned.' He didn't say that, or anything

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13. The Watergate burglary occurred during the campaign of 1972.

14. David Hoffman, "'Serious Mistakes' Made in Iran Deal, Reagan Says." The Washington Post, A1, A9 (Jan, 28) 1987,

like that."[15]

Newsweek noted, that, "Some of his advisers hoped that Reagan would use last week's State of the Union speech to make a frank confession of error and put the scandal behind him...Republicans as well as Democrats were troubled by the lack of substantial agenda in Reagan's proposals....All told, the speech didn't seem much different from its predecessors." [16]

"The speech to me suggested that President Reagan still doesn't understand what the issue is and where is the source of national concern," historian Arthur Shlesinger, who wrote the introduction to a compendium of State of the Union Addresses, noted on the MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour. "President Reagan owes to the American people an explanation of the series of false and misleading statements he's made to us in the last three months about the affair. Far from giving us such an explanation, he made some more false and misleading statements."[17]

Wrote the Post's Hoffman, "he put forward a modest list of domestic policy initiatives, including a not-yet-final proposal to provide catastrophic illness insurance to the elderly, cutbacks in farm subsidies, and experimental projects at the local level to change the welfare system."[18]

Another Post writer, Spencer Rich, wrote, "President Reagan, in last night's State of the Union address, called for insurance to protect the elderly against the costs of castastrophic illness, but he failed to endorse a plan by the Seceretary of Health and Human Services to provide such assistance by expanding Medicare."[19]

His lack of empathy with fellow aging Americans is curious, especially since his Address yields metaphorical clues that the deepest reason Reagan did not address the most crucial questions of the day was that he felt old and tired and debilitated. The Address contains three overt references to his advanced years; two are bravado, one is sympathetic.

The bravado is early in the speech. First he said, "Our Constitution is to be celebrated not for being old, but for being young." Then, he said, "I'm delighted you're celebrating the 200th birthday of the Congress. It's

15. "The Talk of the Town," The New Yorker magazine, 63:25-26 (Feb. 23) 1987.

16. Larry Martz with Thomas M. DeFrank and Eleanor Clift, "Going Nowhere Fast."Newsweek, 109:24-25 (Feb. 9), 1987

17. Rough Draft No. 2983, MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour, March 4, 1987, pp 6,7.

18. Hoffman, pp A1, A9.

19. Spencer Rich, "Reagan Backs 'Catastrophic Protection' for the Aged, But Not the Bowen Plan," The Washington Post, 110:A7 (Jan, 28) 1987.

always a pleasure to congratulate someone with more birthdays than I've had."[20]

Later in the speech, he said, "It's wrong to judge our nation by its years....Over the years--I won't count if you don't --nothing has been so heartwarming as speaking to America's young."[21]

But at the end of the speech he may have revealed his inner feelings about his age by relating a story about Benjamin Franklin at the Constitutional Convention. Franklin was then five years older than Reagan at the 1987 Address. He described him sympathetically this way: "Benjamin Franklin--the oldest delegate at 81 years, and in frail health."[22]

What may have been the most revealing clue to his feelings (perhaps anxiety) about the twilight of his presidency and of his life occurred as slip of the tongue. It was made at the very close of the speech as he said, "Are we at the end? Or are we at the beginning?...my fellow citizens, America isn't finished, her dead, uh, best days have just begun."[23]

The 1987 Address: Audience Echoes

In many ways, the reactions of the Congressional audience that night said more about the speech than any other commentary. It was certainly the most spirited reaction to a State of the Union Message in most people's memories, and seemed to many to be yet another connection to British Parliament, where the Prime Minister is jeered and cheered whenever she addresses the legislators.

The tension between the Republican and Democratic components of the Congressional audience, and the tension produced between the audience and him could be seen on the President's face each time he had to pause in his delivery for an unexpected audience reaction. He was watching a verbal shoot-out across the aisle. The reaction was far from the meant-to-be-orchestrated "applause" and "laughter" indicated at vital points on copies of the speech which had been distributed to each member of the audience. The new Democratic Congress was playing to the TV audience, using the same strategy as the President: using the occasion as a platform by which to communicate directly to the people.

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20. Remarks of the President.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

The two points in the speech which produced the most echoes were those dealing with the Iran mess and the budget deficit. ABC's Donaldson noted after the speech that, "The biggest applause came from Republicans when the President said he made a mistake trying to free American hostages" by sending arms to Iran. Safire observed that when the President made "his ritual denunciation of deficits, he was met in mid-sentence by thunderous applause from the opposition, who semiotically invited him to raise taxes or cut his defense budget."[24]

Newsweek commented that, "What Reagan exuberantly recalled the next day, a friend reports, was the standing ovation that celebrated his arrival in the chamber and his recovery from prostate surgery. What he chose to forget was the Democratic jeering that plainly disconcerted him after he proposed yet again to deal with the annual budget deficits by passing a constitutional amendment outlawing them.[25]

Time reported that, "Younger conservative House members came to the chamber determined to whoop it up for a beleagured President--the more so because some has been warned by Republican Leader Robert Michel, who had seen an advance copy of the address, that 'it ain't going to be much of a speech.'... Democrats waited silently until Reagan pronounced the federal deficit 'outrageous.' Then they jumped to their feet, clapped and shouted in a mocking salute. When Reagan went on to propose again a constitutional amendment requiring a balanced budget, something he has never come close to achieving, the Democrats responded with loud goans of 'awww'--something they never dared when the President was riding high."[26]

That the Reagan sun was setting was apparent, said U.S. News & World Report. "During a curious moment in last week's State-of-the-Union address. Fifteen minutes into the President's themeless discourse, Republicans and Democrats suddenly dissolved into partisan tribes, dueling across the aisles with cheers, applause, catcalls and jeers--in short paying more attention to each other than to the President." [27]

The New Yorker's observer noted wryly, "A silliness seemed to creep into the proceedings and the whole occasion began to deteriorate. The President seemed to lose his audience, which became more occupied with itself than with him and seemed now to be looking through him, or beyond him. It was plain that although President Reagan was in good health the mysterious political force--sometimes called Reaganism--by which he dominated American politics

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24. William Safire, pg. A27.

25. Martz, p. 24.

26. Church, p. 17.

27. Kenneth T. Walsh, with Andy Plattner and Glorie Borger, "Sunset for the Presidency?" U.S. News & World Report, 102:22 (Feb. 9), 1987.

for more than six years was spent.[28]

Writing in the Washington Post, Richard Cohen called the evening low. "Whatever the state of the union might be, that of the State of the Union speech is lousy. The one delivered by President Reagan the other night was an ugly affair, with Republicans patronizing the president with yahoo cheering and Democrats responding with insulting roars of their own. The only thing missing was a GOP attempt to douse the president with Gatorade."[29]

The Grand Rapids Press (MI) noted that, "The two parties often seemed to be trying to outroar each other--much like fans will attempt to prove their superiority before an athletic event...At least 12 times while the Republicans were acting as if their side had scored a touchdown, not more than a half-dozen sets of hands could be seen clapping among the stoic Democrats."[30]

The 1987 Address: The Speaker

The press which was surveyed for this study unanimously gave President Reagan poor grades for his performance on the 1987 State of the Union. His rhetorical gubns were empty. The gunbfight, instead, was on the floor of the Conmgfress. The moment which could have been a turning point in his fight top keep his Presidency viable, which could have enabled him to walk away from the c risis of Iran and unp[recendeted deficits, was lost.[31]

ABC's Brit Hume, commenting after the Speech, said, "The President has had a very light agenda for the past few years and will continue this way for the next few years. The speech did not have the drive for pressing ahead. It did not give cause to recover and to stir the troops." Donaldson added, "What we have seen here is a classic prescription for stalemate for the next few years."

In his evaluation, the Washington Post's Cohen said, "Reagan delivered an intellectually vacuous speech padded with applause lines. When it came to the overriding concern of the moment, his attempts to swap arms for hostages, the president had almost nothing to say. In conformity with current political practice, he accepted responsibility but shunned accountability.

28. "The Talk of the Town," The New Yorker, 62:27-28 (Feb. 9) 1987.

29. Cohen, p. A21.

30. Grand Rapids Press, 95:A4 (Jan. 28), 1987.

31. That he was not on top of the job was the opinion also of the Tower Commission, which issued its report a month later.

He merely expressed regret that somehow a dumb, amateurish plan had not worked...It was called the State of the Union speech. It looked more like 'The Gong Show.'"[32]

An editorial in The Washington Post noted that "the address lived down to expectations. Even a convalesced, septuagenarian Reagan can out-orate younger, healthier statesmen. He demolished rumors of creeping senility, But aside from an intrepid defense of his Central America policy, this was not vintage Reagan.[33]

"Like an old trouper, President Reagan belted out all the old favorites. Old oratory like 'You and I stand on the shoulders of giants'...Old proposals like 'a line-item veto so we can carve out the boondoggles and pork'...Even familiar jokes about his own age. It was as though endless evocations of the old would serve as incantations to the political spirits; as though preserving the illusions of strength would preserve the real thing," stated the N.Y. Times.[34]

Even The Chicago Tribune, long a staunch supporter of Republican presidents, was very critical, as it stated, "In the view of friend and antagonist alike, it was a good performance, worthy of a real pro. But it was not a boffo hit, and in the view of friend and antagonist alike, a boffo hit is what Reagan needed in his sixth and most difficult State of the Union message.[35]

Noted Time, "It was vintage Reagan, so much so that many of the passages--from the ruminations on 'we the people,' to the need to allow God back into the classroom, to the tale about the 'rising sun' on George Washington's chair at the Constitutional Convention--evoked echoes of classics that had been uncorked as far back as the 1980 campaign. His claims that 'we don't have deficits because people are taxed too little [but] because Big Government spends too much' was almost word for word out of his 1986 speech--and out of countless campaign speeches over the years. The assertion that soldiers 'once again wear their uniforms with pride' was in his 1982 State of the Union, among other places....it indicated little awareness that this was January 1987, not 1986 or 1985...One Republican strategist who has long worked with Reagan admitted that it was a bad speech for the current situation, but that the President used it because he felt

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32. Cohen, p. A 21.

33. "A Missed Chance." The Washington Post, 110:A21 (Jan. 28) 1987.

34. "The State of the Union." N.Y. Times, 136:A26 (Jan. 29) 1987.

35. Jon Margolis, "Old themes get new push as speech leans on past." Chicago Tribune. 140:1 (Jan. 28), 1987.

36. George J. Church, with Michael Duffy and Barrett Seaman, "The State of

comfortable with it."[36]

More acerbic critics, such as Michael Harrington, noted that President Reagan's famous looseness with facts occurred in the speech. Harrington wrote, "President Reagan's brief comment on our 'welfare monster' in the State of the Union message...is merely a conservative cliche based on the strange assumption that our system of welfare, which is run by 50 states and the District of Columbia, is somehow overcentralized."[37]

Most of the press agreed that the speech did not do what it could have done: persuaded the public that his presidency was still viable. The N.Y. Times's Apple noted, "Mr. Reagan is seen differently by the electorate to which he spoke in television tonight than at any other time in his presidency. Although he asserted that 'we have done much these past years to restore our defenses, our alliances and our leadership in the world,' a New York Times-CBS News Poll of 1,509 voters, taken between Jan. 18 and 21, indicated that the public has strong doubts on that point."[38]

Edward Bassett, dean of the Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University, who covered Reagan as governor of California, explained, "The State of the Union is a blueprint, a map that the journalist must lay out for the reading public. It is full of clues and keys. The main one now is the answer to the question 'Is he strong enough to govern?' The answer to that question is not discernable in his manipulated press conferences or his set speeches. We all recognize his mannerisms well now. He can't fool us any more. It is clear he is weak."

It was U.S. News & World Report's observation that seemed most apt, since it emphasized the metaphor which Reagan had picked for his own demise as leader. Wrote Walsh, Plattner, and Borger, "Those on the White house who had hoped Reagan's performance would catapult him out of his current political trough were deeply disappointed...Reagan may have unwittingly provided the most pertinent metaphor describing his administration in last week's State of the Union speech when he referred to a frail, 81-year-old Ben Franklin pondering whether the sun was rising or setting on the American experiment in 1787. Franklin concluded that it was the start of a new day."[39]

But for Reagan, and his White House-in-turmoil, the sun of his presidency already seemed to be setting. And many observers in press and public envisioned him riding into that sunset and history, following so many

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Reagan." Time, 129:16-18 (Feb. 9) 1987, p. 16.

37. Michael Harrington, "Jobs, Not Welfare." The New York Times, (Feb. 5, 1987) p. A27.

38. Apple, p.7

39. Walsh, p. 23.

of the Western heroes of his generation of films.

Conclusion

The State of the Union is a unique media opportunity, one in which the President can face the nation electronically and assume the mantle of statesman, thanks to the backdrop of the assembled Congress.

The 1987 Address and its circumstances can be viewed from the perspective of the Press, which reported it. Mass Media suggested that President Reagan's speech was anticipated as especially important because the Administration was in a crisis of believability with the public. He would have to play hero for his Administration to survive. The occasion turned into an audience participation cheering-jeering match between Republicans and Democrats as a reaction to a disappointing, uninspiring speech which merely repeated old ideas and old phrases and offered no fresh approaches designed to save any remaining effectiveness of the Administration for its last two years.

In the end, the President postured as one of the heroes in the kind of Western films he made when he was an actor, riding off toward the sunset.